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ON REFUSING

**A personal preface
by KINGSLEY WIDMER
to a handbook on
selective troublemaking**

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On Refusing

Personal preface to a handbook on selective trouble-making

KINGSLEY WIDMER

NOT LONG AGO I SPOKE AT AN ANTI-WAR RALLY to a few hundred people under the eucalyptus trees in a Southern California city park. I've been doing that, as part of my obligation of public refusal, whenever asked by student or liberal-left political groups for some years now. Indeed, for more than twenty years, though the opportunities to speak against the American political megalomania were rare until the war in Vietnam reached major scale. As usual, my remarks in the park were brief arguments against the destructive hypocrisies of United States institutions and a plea for resisting them.

Though mostly a recital of what should be obvious, I like to think that I added a few touches of the tangible and sardonic to the usual protest oratory. My reception by the largely youthful audience was politely positive. The next speaker, a black-bereted black militant, started about like this: "Who owns and runs this goddamn country? White mother-fuckers! Who kills brown Vietnamese? Who kills black Americans? The same white mother-fuckers! We're gonna make a revolution and take this country away from the white mother-fuckers!" When he finished his half-hour black mass on white American mother-fuckerism, he raised his right fist above his head and chanted, with the audience enthusiastically joining in, "Power to the people! Power to the people!" Then an exceptionally well-amplified rock

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group took up the applause, the beat vibrating even the ancient eucalyptus, and overpowered all mere people in the park.

Peace, brother, but that's not my style. I do not object to the ghetto poetry—the metaphors of sexual violation have always, and quite properly, been central to rebellion—nor do I object to the performance's surreal irrelevance to “peace” since protest actions primarily serve as aesthetic rituals for dissident para-communities. But the racist anti-racism, the resentful populist cry for power, and the muddling of tangible rebellion with pretences to revolution, seem finally repressive. Aggrandizing black mother-fuckers would not necessarily be much improvement over aggrandizing white mother-fuckers. That's just the old politics, again, when we need to de-race and de-power in erasing a whole imposed mode of consciousness.

Underneath the generous rage of my fellow speakers I heard the beat of a parochial and sadly reversible revolutionism. Granted, we should support authentic protest, which this also included, whenever and wherever. Purist political fantasies, whether of bureaucratic reformism, proletarian revolution, or technological and educational magic, subserve even greater moral ambiguities. Yet radical intelligence must also be detachment and I felt that the tone and style the occasion serviced were not sufficiently radical. I also later wryly reflected that I may have gotten through more successfully to the undercover military cop (so identified to me by a reporter) who slyly questioned me after my speech than I did to much of the audience. So: Whose radical am I?

Let me answer with a couple of stories which, I ruefully note, must partake of history since for an American radical these days I am old—not only paunchy and suburbanized but necessarily responsive to an accumulated reality. After all, it has been a generation since I first bit the bullet of social bitterness as a field hand and factory worker, as an infantry soldier and prison convict, as a declassé and dissident. But the ancient radicalism I would affirm has less to do with political “generations”—that ideological sleight of hand to reduce the critical to the merely chronological or a fleeting biology of discontent—than with the persistent refusal of a false social ordering. If radical criticism and refusal mean much, then they must apply beyond the topical and generational, residing finally in a permanent radicalism of social transformation. Only that deserves allegiance.

Society, for example, must still redeem the curse of labour. That will not be done, as our latest piety pretends, by technology alone since its processes do not contain outraged human awareness—indeed, technological order discourages and represses any larger human responsiveness. Yet most of our technologists and economists and political moralists grievously obscure the work issues. Long ago I lost the knack of understanding such people. Was it when I hoed beans in a hot midwestern sun for ten cents an hour? Or unloaded, for subsistence pay, freight cars of coal with a scoop and wheelbarrow? Or worked twelve-hour shifts running a dangerous steam filler, in 120-plus degree heat, in a canning factory? No matter when or at what, that bitter sense of monotonous, arbitrary, body- and mind-

wracking labour, without autonomy or reasonable reward, remains a basic and black reality. May theorizing never undercut the truths of memory!

Granted, my examples are old-fashioned, though they still apply to millions of Americans, not to mention most of the rest of the human world. Because of those experiences, I am permanently deaf to talk of Gross National Product affluence, or technologically marvellous social order, or any other claim to “advanced” civilization that does not minimize the sweated drudgeries and maximize the just solace for those forced to do our painful and unpleasant labours.

Most basically, liberty must always be tested on the labour and eroticism and vitality of the body. Except in the fantasies of bureaucratic technology, whose pathological quality is evident in its current Egyptian monumentality and rocketing lunacies, our struggle remains for the tangible necessities of the human flesh. For society to honestly recognize the burden of labour means that no businessman receive higher rewards than the field hand hacking with a short hoe; that no exalted professional merits as much honour as those mucking out our coal and crap; that no fashionable entertainer or artist receive as good a treatment as the most menial labourer or domestic. I know on my nerves, having been both, that the garbageman deserves to be better paid and comforted than the college professor. Any contrary social ordering is not only wrong but certain, by its corrupting denial of basic human reality, to be pervasively ugly and vicious.

But let me take an example of dehumanized labouring beyond the essential moral revulsion. A few years ago I practised the trade of airframe “template maker” in various plants and job-shops in three western states. After several months of making metal patterns in one of the largest, and reputedly most “progressive” plants, my boredom reached such excruciation that some gesture towards critical change was imperative. From the better writings on the subject as well as from my co-workers I know that my reaction was unexceptional. Many a factory worker, not just a *poete maudet* with a hand drill, finds his routine painful, his conditions of work arbitrary and his sense of life emptied. Above a certain minimum, issues of pay and other “benefits” only concern the condiments, not the life-diet. To those reduced to being controlled functions in a factory (and the similar, if sometimes more lavish, dehumanizations of office and business and profession), the alternatives consist of escape, degeneration and counter-assertion.

My counter-assertion no doubt revealed a peculiar naivete. I combined my responses to the tooling shop with some of the studies on industrial organization and came up with a moderate list of rational changes that would help humanize my work. When I then consulted a noted academic specialist on how I might initiate these, he exhibited acute embarrassment. He did provide two pieces of wisdom on how I might modify my life in the factory: I should go back to school to major in Industrial Relations, thus both getting out of the shop and “getting ahead”—the usual American ideal of “opportunity” substituting for justice and meaning—and I should spend my spare time in

politics, in liberal-Democratic chores in a Republican suburb. Such counselling passes for "realism" in therapy as well as in politics.

Next, the labour union. With difficulty, I finally presented my critical suggestions to someone at a low level in that hierarchy. My points ranged from making the "breaks" concur with the job (i.e. take a smoke or coffee at a natural place in the work instead of being bound by a rigid plant-wide schedule), through co-operative decisions on work assignments to a procedure for electing foremen. All such proposals were angrily rejected. The union, like most "pressure groups" in a pseudo-pluralistic society, usually bends and bulges only in the accepted ways. I quickly learned that individual and various conditions, such as flexible rest periods, lacked drama and therefore had no chance as bargaining issues; everybody knew that assignments and promotions were purely corporate prerogatives; and that I'd better "get with it". Though too dumb to say it, the union official's tone insisted that arbitrary production requires arbitrary authority, including his own, rather than autonomy for those doing the work.

My even raising such questions was suspect: "Just what *are* your politics?" They certainly weren't going to appear anti-union. Some years earlier I had raised some questions to an official in a different union and obtained my answers from two persuasive gentlemen who wanted me to make contact with the hard realities of the problems and so repeatedly put my head against a brick wall. In addition to my cowardice, I felt some reluctance in pushing things because my experience in a non-union shop, where I was fired for talking too much, inclined me to prefer a union which re-enforced false conditions to no union at all. (The dilemma remains: as president of a college professor's union local, I find that a majority of my colleagues want to aggrandize salaries and the institutional surrogate for themselves rather than radically change education. One can only serve by subverting.)

Then I started arguing my way up the company hierarchy, finally reaching one of the biggest incompetents, the Plant Superintendent. That was a scene of comic pathos in a cubicle high above the assembly line: the thickly nervous factory Major General, on company time, trying to get rid of a loquacious, unshaven, T-shirted third-rate tool-maker inexplicably spending his off-time arguing about perfectly standard shop procedures. The Super came on with phony geniality, then irritated belligerence, and finally collapsed into a self-made-boss intimacy, lamenting that he'd never understood those "industrial psych" courses he had to take in night school, and concluding, hand on my shoulder, "What can I do for you? Put you in for a promotion?" No, I wanted to be able to smoke my pipe at reasonable intervals, to work out with the other template men the divying up of the jobs—it might even be more "efficient"!—rather than be trapped by engineering numbers and foremen's caprice, and, in sum, we wanted to be a bit more our own bosses and make some changes. Wasn't that reasonable? He agreed but wearily assured me that what I asked would require getting rid of all those goddam personnel people, changing the company

and union contractual procedures, and not only reorganizing the whole plant but the prime contractor, the US Government. Such a vicious circle allows only one real rational reform; by its own logic, the system must go.

The standard escapes urged upon me—becoming an "industrial relations" decorator or climbing the shop hierarchy—would only aggrandizingly re-enforce the viciousness. In the long run, such an order must be radically transformed; in the short run, it must be resisted if one is to remain humanly distinct. For both, we need more effective and intransigent ways of negation. That is the main "social issue" of our time. At that point all I could do was give my humble bit: take "breaks" when I damn well pleased, set my own slowed-down work schedule, knock off days, and agitate others to go the same way. Personal intransigence must ground any genuine radical awareness, not least as defence against the self-destructive schizophrenia which sickens our institutions. While neither demands for individuality nor group social justice will be sufficient to give real freedom, equality and meaning to most work in our society, that is where a communal politics must start.

Surely refusal can take more subtle, less naive, ways than mine—though they had better not be too subtle. The essential obtuseness of our institutions to humanely rational amelioration from below can also be put in a harsher light. When I was a convict in a federal prison I found that there, too, that radical intransigence, personal as well as ideological, provided the only pertinent responses. Though prison was less nastily totalitarian than the US Army, the grim, gray tedium—the surface of the basic terrorism which controls all "total" institutions such as armies and prisons and hospitals—forces almost everybody to "hard time" it. Aside from that, my own situation as head convict librarian, combined with the fortuitous double protection of a senior "screw" and an extortionist who was an inmate leader, became downright comfortable, for a prison.

But since the prison system (run in large part by the more corrupt inmates) was grossly unjust, and since I was there for having defied the government, a radical response was imperative.*

In that "correctional institution" usual ameliorist criticisms were undercut by a "liberal" administration. For example, the place was racially segregated but since the "ghetto" sections of the cell blocks and mess hall were the most desirable ones, the Negroes protested any

*Though as a combat veteran of World War II I was not legally subject to further military service, I refused, as a point of anti-authoritarian principle, to complete registration when conscription was reinstituted in 1948. I was convicted of felonious violation of the Selective Service Act and, from characteristic American righteousness (plus some of the Cold War psychology developing then) sentenced to eight months in prison instead of the more logical suspended sentence. While I am now less naive about the American character, I would still emphasize such action as a necessary self-definition against a false society. Radicalism without some such grounding appears to me as often dubiously abstract-sentimental.

efforts to reduce them to "equal" conditions—a shrewd bigotry which may show a useful future. When I also objected that the educational system only existed on paper and in rare dress appearances of "rehabilitation", my complaints got me the additional job of convict-head of the prison school. As with most official educational roles, the main effect was moral solace since I didn't really do a very good job of teaching aged illiterates. Finally, my recognition of the co-opting pattern discouraged me from very vigorous complaints about the psychiatric and religious services for fear that I might be led to unnecessary additional lessons in humility.

But what could I do? Certainly I could have joined a prison reform society, after I got out. Or I could have stuck to my intellectual bench and worked out a sociological theory of the imperviousness of "total" institutions to the usual forms of criticism, as correctly do the few good writings on the society of captives. Or I could make the selfish "best of a bad situation", which I had already done though I was not quite self-regarding enough to claim it as a social philosophy. Since the authorities were constitutionally incapable of making more than trivial gestures of justice and were psychotically deaf to cons (except for the Captain of the Guards, all too open to persuasion since he was the biggest crook around), and since the elite among the cons (confidence men, extortionists, and similar professionals) were intelligent but over-adaptable types with power-roles to conserve, the usual elitist and educational theories of change were irrelevant. (There's nothing like a totalitarian institution for checking out the social and political theorists!)

But one discovers another elite, usually submerged: the "brilliant psychopaths", the extreme, "deviant", personalities who lead riots and escapes. While "outside" institutions make elaborate efforts to remove these dissidents—probably because they are usually superior persons in intelligence and competence to those in power—prisons, themselves the places of removal, find it difficult to be inhumanly pure. (Following contemporary educational and psychological programming, prisons and armies and their imitators now do attempt to change this by a "scientific"—that is, conservative—process of segregation.) To the degree that most of our institutions parallel the totalitarian ones—and that must be considerable since the total institutions do the basic controlling of the society—we may find that "psychopaths" provide the real possibilities for change. We need not draw any sentimental conclusion that such efforts will always be for the best, only that this is the major route of possibility, still not fully excluded in our carefully modulated and dehumanized orderings. Any serious social-political theory of change, then, must in effect include a Table of Organization entitled "Beating the System: Where To Have the Madmen". If it doesn't, it's the usual bullshit, so out with it.

What I am defending here is what one of my Neomarxist friends condemns as my "lumpen elitism of the desperate poetic imagination". Lovely phrase, but I more than once, and in a variety of roles—from merchant seamen through advertising hack and university professor—

discovered the significance of that psychopathic elite not by theory but by need and by natural taste in friends. They are more lively, if somewhat more difficult.

And this led me to one of the few ways of meaningful action in prison. A psychopathic young con, the compulsive captive and congenital hard-timer, mildly screwed-up and was bum rapped with a bad work reassignment. He confided his rage, and break-out plans, to me. As in most institutions in our society, prison job placement and promotion primarily come about through sycophancy (and related corruption), custodial security, and (at the unconscious level) psychosomatic typologies, not by competence and need and desire. The human discrepancies show up most glaringly in closed systems but, even when admitted, are not likely to be corrected since rational standards for jobs would not only displace convicts whose power situations (as in the bakery and dispensary) were crucial to the illicit structure of business and pleasure but would threaten the pathology of the whole system. If one kiss-ass goes, why not the rest of them? While "advantage" and "avoiding trouble" block revision, the basic warping, not just the usually claimed "self-interest", needs to be assaulted. Change, therefore, requires a psychic as well as practical disproportion. To be *rational* appropriate, efforts at reform must be *excessive* in apparent style, disruptive not only of identification and advantage but of over-all order. Contrary to the smug pieties of narrow rationality in so much of our social and political thought, nothing less will do. True politics is the art of trouble-making.

I encouraged my psychopathic fellow con to dramatically refuse his new job assignment, and backed him up by "unreasonably" refusing to work myself. Further steps included encouraging the other psychopaths to "act out", refusing to go to the mess hall as the start of a hunger strike, and making demands about everything. These direct actions depended less on the moral suasion often claimed for civil disobedience than on countering "advantage" (a lot of unpleasant extra work for the short-handed screws), on dramatic enlargement (people were pushed into choosing sides almost in spite of themselves), and on the obviously swelling psychic explosiveness. The authorities took the easy out and made the sensible changes in job assignments, and I went back to eating, work and ineffective liberalism. Later, my friend went over the wall anyway. Granted, in this prison such methods had previously been used by "political" prisoners so that my role, and therefore the action, were identified as ideological rather than just sick or selfish. Without such definition, the sequence would have been quite unlikely. What radicals do, the justification for their interminable argument and dramatization, is essentially esthetic: they not only create awareness but scenarios for social and political responses.

Perhaps in this case (as also in the army when I several times led buddies "over the hill" but also back again) I took the cowardly way out in not pushing additional demands, fomenting more drastic responses, upping the ante to violent disruption. I may be guilty of excessive moderation, which rationalizes as a search for a continuing

refusal rather than a spastic riot, selective rebellion rather than chiliastic revolution. Of course I know that total institutions can only be reformed by being negated, but overwhelming violence may less defeat them than demythification and continuing refusal and rebellion. So, I believe, generally with this social order.

Factories and prisons led to much the same experiential conclusions. But, for a social theory, what of the other institutions? To which I can only reply with a sincerity no longer naive: What *other* institutions? Someone usually suggests "good" institutions, say, schools and universities. Agreed, they may well be more pleasant as well as more honorifically glossy. Probably that is much of the cause of the proliferation of educational institutions these days. After all, the technicians and bureaucrats which they primarily produce could be trained and indoctrinated on the job. But our fancied up bureaucracies serve as half-escapes, selective and pious substitutes, from our most obviously indefensible institutions of control and exploitation.

Everyone, of course, senses that the schools are dominated by custodial functions and indoctrination for submission. And the half-dozen universities in which I have professed can best be compared, in exact as well as broad detail, to factories of a more sloppily indulgent but malicious and incompetent sort. Hired learning, of course, reveals itself more comfortably hypocritical than "total" institutions but less rationally ordered than "productive" institutions which come up more directly against material nature.

However, all institutions these days, even if we still manage to distinguish those for products or education or pure control, seem increasingly ambiguous as they synthetically merge indoctrination with products and technical services with control. Suggestively, such synthetic organizations may arrive at similar weaknesses so that, say, student revolts can provide paradigms for refusal in all institutions. Presently our "best" institutions would seem to be, contrary to my own libertarian sentiments for small organizations, the large and mediocre. The controls, such as hierarchical anxiety, cannot be taken too seriously, and the purposes and functions are sufficiently confused and inefficient to allow tolerance and autonomy. If we encourage this cynical state, and I see no reasonable alternative in the desire for freedom, then we must try to simultaneously create new life, which would therefore be oppositional social and cultural styles, within and without.

Naturally (to answer an obvious objection) one recognizes differences between various institutions. Anyone who has been in a few jails knows the drastic dissimilarities between the small "county tank", usually a vicious hole, and the large "federal correctional facility", which can be outgamed and resisted like any other bureaucratic institution. But jails remain jails. Control can be nice or nasty without ceasing to be control. So, too, with indoctrination; change in costume is not change in character. (*Mea culpa*: the infantry non-com who once gave compulsory lectures—it was that or punishment—to the troops on "Why America Fights" now gives, for a slightly dishonorable professorial living, covertly compulsory lectures on "Conflict in

American Culture".) Strategies for liberation must vary—guerrilla tactics don't work well against "nice" repression in "good" institutions (a mistake of some recent student rebels)—so that one refuses the covert order actually present and thus brings to consciousness the functional and ideological similarities of most of our institutions. The most appropriate disenchantment still focuses on "the authorities", the realization that essentially the same people as well as ideologies run the "good" and the "bad" institutions, not only the businesses and the governments, and the factories and the services, but the schools and the jails, and the universities and the armies. In several senses, it is all a "total" order.

I desist from an academic anecdote to parallel those of factory and prison and complete my institutional sketch, though my file on Academic Bureaucracy Baiting swells largest of all. Just a passing illustration. I have usually been shocked by the people I know who become successful, powerful, rich, famous. Not that stupid machine and human toad! So with the news that a former college room-mate of mine had become executive officer of one of the leading American universities. I remembered him as a real dummy, a silly cheater, and a generally inadequate person. Surely I overlooked something which made him more than an ambitiously unprincipled jerk. Didn't he have some sort of special quality? A moral chameleon sensitivity . . . an unusual energy for trivia . . . a crypto-homosexual responsiveness to superiors. . . . Any talent to justify my former room-mate as a top administrator turns out to be a social and human deficiency. Of course he also has the special craft it takes to identify with institutional ideology and power, and to suck on. I hear that he acts a trifle better than some in his role because still impulsively muddled. Perhaps, to look for the happy side, people partly boosted him up as a substitute for someone much more competent and evil.

Since I've been mostly at the bottom of orders, I admit some puzzlement over those at the top. Might I be mistaking the ways of peripheral examples for the real thing—for the big entrepreneurs, the major organizers, the military masters, the driving technologists, the famed authorities? But careful researches lead only to the conclusion that most of the controlling and wealthy and celebrated turn out to be even less adequate human beings than my successful ex-room-mate. Indeed, many in power can only be explained with antique notions of insanity and evil. Most of our power figures deserve the greatest contempt. Why don't more people say so?

All the usual selfish and sick explanations apply, but some that can certainly be changed include the pretences at objectivity, the pseudo-scientific intellectual fashions, which turn out to be merely conservative manners. Even the better social moralists these days do not often savage the powerful and rich and celebrated, except when their behaviour seems exceptionally unfair. But the unfairness is really what all of them are, and nothing more. Even if they were only as you and I, they would tend to be worse because of what one must be as well as do in getting, and staying, on top. More often

the powerful are the less intelligent and responsive to start with. One must simply conclude, and act, as if the powerful were no good, which is true. In the long run they must go; in the short run we should refuse them, not least by treating them with the scorn they merit.

Though probably justifiable, the violent destruction of the powerful does not seem very tempting. The sensible arguments against violence apply, the most rational of which is that the wrong people usually get it in the neck. Also, the politics of resentment puts other vicious people on top. The only true radical alternative is not to have any top, and right now. Our refusing of power, our de-authoritisation, must be both specific and pervasive. Currently, Western societies seem midway towards demythification of power. Not only do we find an increasing amorphousness (where *is* the boss?) characteristic of control in bureaucratic-technological programming but an undercutting culture in which hierarchial submission combines with surreal contempt. So silly are our "leaders"—the comic statesmen, the administrative nullities, the rootless rich, the fatuous celebrities—so lacking in social imagination and moral style and even interesting personal qualities, that some humane people hopefully assume that we have already achieved self-rule by default. Unfortunately, in the amorphous order of overwhelming mass-technological power even what little our leading fools do come out disproportionately destructive. Also from that arises our recurrent disguised authoritarianism, the destructive ambivalence in which many "decent" people yearn for some pretence at authoritative power instead of demanding self-rule. Then we get the fancy statesmen and swinging administrators and charming leaders who would claim to really lead. They, in fact, start our wars and put outmoded rhetoric into counterfeit social ordering, thus inhibiting real change. Should radical refusal here prefer the mediocre fools, just as, in truth, we prefer the large ineffective bureaucracies?

Some choice! Yet, in effect, we must sometimes make it. More importantly, we must make the system make it. If we chose political and economic and institutional leaders by random selection—frequent blind drawings for celebrities and artists as well as administrators and rulers—we would no doubt come out with a better selection than we generally get. We should find ways to encourage such devaluations as steps towards a better social ordering which quite separates real authority—the ability to do, to know, to say, to exemplify—from most prerogative and force. In the meantime, we refuse anything less by resisting all claims to authoritative power. If Oedipus can't find Laius, we move towards the day when he no longer rages when he does find him, and his own guilt. To dissolve the ancient curse means to turn it into a daily dance of life.

You may label the social-politics I have been sketching "sceptical anarchism" (in partial contrast to the positivistic and optimistic sort) or "conservative nihilism" (a persistent unfrenzied negation of false order). In any dramatistic sense of society, one recognizes that such

action must be played out, so we might just as well be self-conscious about it. Certainly I would not claim for refusal a total politics. But negation prepares for creation. Only the paranoid, on both sides, take destruction as definitive. And by far the most destructive among us seem to be those who never claim it. Not the anarchists and nihilists but the positive saviours advance the great historical crimes. Even on the smaller scene, institutions which cannot bear with considerable refusal deserve to go under. Since we should never reduce the human to equation with its institutions, better them than us. And by so doing we might just possibly move towards that new communal order of human proportions which we so desperately need.

Somewhat elliptically, to lessen the false abstraction of social-political theorizing, I have been refusing some often accepted premises of social criticism and change. Anecdotally, I have been arguing for a community of refusal, a libertarian praxis in which ideological radicalism (the vision of an institutionally transformed society) and personal radicalism (intransigent behaviour and variant life-style) must go together. Their separation still pervades most of what passes for politics. Partly a 19th-century mania for repressively respectable virtue even in opposition—Jacobin puritanism—only now do we see it dissolving with such liveliness as the beat-hippy-underground styles of contemporary radicalization. A polymorphousness of sexuality and imagination and rebellion subverts the rigid sensibility which, leftist or not, can only maintain rather than radicalize our daily institutions. I see it as a new insight, though still alien to the politically-minded, the trend in contemporary Western society that social and cultural rebellion precede rather than follow revolutionary political changes of institutional order.

The revolutionism which seeks organized external mass methods of power usually insists on subordinating social and cultural revolution to political activity. Instead of refusing power, that heightens it, and ends conserving the repressive character and authority of institutions. Revolution and reaction agree in condemning styles of refusal as romantic and utopian and deviationist. Mere politics thus becomes the new displacement of full humanness, generating a new terrorism and totalism of *le peuple* or the proletariat or a political organization or an historical process. Revolutionism is not nearly radical enough.

To turn false institutional order into more fully human proportions requires not so much force as deconversion from the reigning faiths. For as one painfully discovers in doing battle with our controlling organizations, faith, not just power, maintains these institutional mountains. Or, as my farmer grandfather used to put it, "Ta sell corn ya gotta raise corn an' ta raise corn ya gotta believe in corn." With most of our traditional deities decrepit, our civilization passionately holds itself together with quite paltry convictions, such as a religiosity about bureaucratic technology. Especially from unadmitted faiths, deconversion cannot simply be reasonable but would seem to require, like conversion, radical experiences and traumatic breaks and imaginative disruptions of consciousness. Thus politics of gesture and fancy

and defiance and shock might be more productive in breaking the faith than the usual organizing of the barricades and bureaucracies of dissent. Refusal in our society may need new oppositional styles.

The great unwritten work in contemporary social thought, which I am prefacing, may be "Humanizing Technological Organization" by the descendants of Ned Lud. The radical criticism, the dissident way, the comic resistance, the emphatic difference, the intransigent act, and all the other ways of refusal, must be put both against and inside our institutional orderings. Furthering rebellious life-styles, no matter how weirdly Joachimite they may be, constitutes radical change now. So does institutional subversion, such as that considerable folk lore and practice of "beating the bureaucracy" and "fighting the system". They already exist—and in an expansive state—otherwise our institutions would be totally unbearable since patently not designed for passionate human fullness. Far more than revolutionary postures, the multiform ways of refusal and the continuing demythification and other negations may redeem the curse of labour by transforming its justice, decorrupt authority by removing its force, and humanize power by making it immediate and personal. To prefer libertarian rebellion to megalomaniac revolutionism also affirms the wonderful anarchy of the sexual and social and cultural "revolutions" actually going on around us. Only by way of rebellion comes contemporary community.

The favourite myth of those who would master others is that denial is bad—bad manners, bad policy, even bad psychology. Do they most fear its truth, its effectiveness or its pleasure? By a fraudulent calculus, they also conclude that a total order of human attrition comes out less destructive than a liberating negation. But the simple truth, discoverable here and now, is that a richer human life often comes from a joyous NO!

Notes on the corporate ownership of art

IAN TOD and JULIUS HOGBEN

THE FUTURE OF THE TATE GALLERY IN LONDON has been subject to public comment for some months now. More than just a building is at stake. This should have been a great opportunity to progress from countering the aesthetic qualities of the present building with the technical merit of the new plan, and vice versa, to asking: What are the purposes of the Tate and other public galleries? A public debate is the natural place to raise such questions, discuss them and propose consequent actions. The correspondence columns of *The Times* and a pile of spontaneous comments from the Tate's paltry public relations campaign, are no substitute for a public debate. The one characteristic common to all recorded remarks on the Tate has been the avoidance of the basic issue: the place of art within our society, particularly that art owned by the society as a whole.

The experience of art is not merely a matter between the work and the isolated individual: the experience is inseparable from its context. It is impossible to extract the art experience of theatre from the context of the audience group. Music in a concert is critically different from the same music in one's own home. The experience of art is both group and individual, each occasion containing varying proportions of the two. Perhaps spectacle represents one end of the scale, and a non-repetitive kinetic work containing a single human represents the other—a military tattoo, say, compared with a space capsule. The art generally available in our galleries operates primarily at the personal end of the scale. Our experience of WHAAM! varies little with the number of people looking at it. The addition of music would probably affect it considerably; but this is one of the realms of experience denied to us in our galleries, except where it is thought

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formally and functionally appropriate, as in the Victoria and Albert Museum's musical instrument room. It can hardly be said that our national galleries go out of their way to put their exhibits in contexts sympathetic to the experience of art.

We use the word "experience" when discussing art, for that is the only way we can reach it. There is only value in the experience, without which the so-called art work is dead. A work of art does not exist in the abstract, in isolation from human beings. It is only recognised as art in so far as there is a consensus of opinion that the experience generated by the work is "artistic". The art is in the experience. A work of art is a stimulator of experience, individual experience. This is not just a function of a work in isolation, but of the whole context of a work in which the individual participates.

The Tate Gallery contains part of the national collection of experience stimulators. To whom are they made available and how far does their context distort and condition the experience? The current environment of art is one of mystification. The works are surrounded by an esoteric language which blocks experience for the uninitiated and preconditions the response of the initiated. Thus art loses the capacity to widen man's experience. Only those who supposedly know what to think can "appreciate" it.

It is not surprising, therefore, that art is seen primarily as a commodity. Perhaps it is the perfect saleable object, having scarcity value (remember the howl of indignation at the pass-production of Takis' sculpture, and the prohibitions against what the law defines as "mass-production", i.e. more than a handful of replicas of the same art work), and virtually guarantees escalation in currency value. Four-fifths of the Tate's acquisitions are annual hoarded, rarely, if ever, to be seen again. The commodity aspect has taken over. All art has become Fine Art. Maybe we are preparing to proceed from a gold to a Fine Art monetary standard.

People who have grown fat in the competitive world market for the commodity-fetish which Fine Art now is, naturally think in terms of a competitive international museum field. In this view national art galleries are rival Fine Art agglomerations jostling for survival in the prestige stakes. To John Russell of the *Sunday Times*, the ultimate bourgeois, a new Tate Gallery is an end in itself, virtually independent of the art it houses: "given such a building, we could patronise Paris . . . feel at ease in Amsterdam . . . and not too much outclassed in New York." It sounds like a whore in a dress by Dior. Given a different definition of the value of art in our society, it follows that the architecture and cubic capacity of a Tate Gallery is largely irrelevant to the individual and social experience of art. A well-lit shed, canteen, tube or railway station, a park, a playground, an old or new town centre, wherever people gather, there is a place for art.

It is equally irrelevant to talk of finding more cash for galleries by all manner of accountant's fancies—whether by tax incentives for the rich, state lotteries, or larger grants from the Arts Council, that

wet-nurse for an elitist art syndrome. Above all, let us not add a prohibitive price structure to the prohibitive cultural structure which already bars the majority from the experience of art.

The function of a national collection must be to reveal its experience stimulants, not to conceal them. Nor must they be available only to those whose language of mystification defines "art", but to the whole people. Throughout the 19th century the museum and art gallery were conceived as the bastions of those liberal—i.e. literary, classical and elitist—values so dear to the heart of the ruling classes. The service of an elite is brought up to date in the South Bank cultural ghetto. Here is London's latest public gallery, the Hayward, with its esoteric and super-sophisticated architecture, repelling to all but those in the know. Its form—art bunker—is entirely appropriate to an agglomeration which has the effect of erecting an impenetrable barrier between the Fine Art consumers and "the rest". And it is not satisfactory to say of "the rest" that "they are not interested, and anyway do not understand". For the most part they have had no opportunity, and the "appreciative" few condemn experience different from their own as misunderstanding or ignorance.

The national collections make little effort to render the nation's art available to its corporate owners. In effect their policy is one of centralisation and concealment, both of which must be reversed. All additions to the Tate's hoard must be opposed. The Trustees are fearful of circulating the collection, through an acquisitive and conservative desire to keep it for that special public of appreciative Londoners and prestigious tourists. (Nearly a million visitors last year? How many of these were making their *n*th visit?) We should demand that all nationally owned works of art are available for view at any one time somewhere in the country—in empty office blocks if necessary.

A new look at new art also means a new look at old art. Contemporary art is supposed to demand contemporary conceptions of presentation to the public. More traditional art equally deserves new methods of presentation. The revolutionaries of modern art, if they wielded any power in this matter, would not wish their own works to

Public places, theatres, academies, classrooms, gymnasia, concert halls, and dance halls, cafés, town halls, libraries, etc., it is these which art should adorn and embellish without counting on domestic patronage. . . .

A museum is not the destination for works of art; it is simply a place of study and passage, a collection of antiques, of things which, owing to circumstances, can be placed nowhere else. They are the pensioners among beautiful things which a progressive civilisation puts out of use.

P. J. PROUDHON: *Carnets* 1845

be entombed in a museum. They should protest against any work of any epoch being isolated in this way.

Why has the Tate not investigated environmental enclosures for single works or groups of works which would allow them to appear in places now considered unsuitable? The usual excuse for non-distribution is either the great value or great fragility of the work, or both, which must be "protected". But modern society is daily evolving 100 new ways of protecting property. As art has its value only in the experience, so let us have it. Throw open your cellars and reveal the wonders therein.

Take those wonders off their pedestals and make them an everyday part of our lives. Otherwise, please admit the financial determinants of the game, and stop pretending you are concerned with art.

SUMMARY

1. Art is individual experience.
2. Fine Art is a commodity-fetish.
3. Fine Art is defined as such, and segregated from society by an elite and its exegetes for its own purposes.
4. The national collection of British and modern art is confined to a limited public in one gallery in the capital city.
5. The architecture and cubic capacity of a public gallery is largely irrelevant to the individual experience of art.
6. Art must become available to its corporate owners in differing environments, not just in London but throughout Britain.

CORRECTIONS TO ANARCHY 99 AND ANARCHY 102

The sources for the two Cohn-Bendit interviews which were published in ANARCHY 99 were reversed. As indicated in the introductory article, the interview with Daniel Cohn-Bendit was actually printed in *Magazine Littéraire* 18 (May, 1968), and that with Gabriel Cohn-Bendit was in *Magazine Littéraire* 19 (July, 1968).

The Kropotkin essay which was published in ANARCHY 102 with the title "The expropriation of dwellings" was in fact first printed in *Le Révolté* in July and August, 1886, with the title "Le Logement", and was reprinted not in *Paroles d'un Révolté* (1885) but in *La Conquête du Pain* (1892). The English translation was first printed in FREEDOM in August and October, 1894, with the title "Dwellings", and was reprinted in *The Conquest of Bread* (1906)

N.W.

Not any power : reflections on decentralism

GEORGE WOODCOCK

I WAS ASKED TO WRITE on decentralism in history, and I find myself looking into shadows where small lights shine as fireflies do, endure a little, vanish, and then reappear like Auden's messages of the just. The history of decentralism has to be written largely in negative, in winters and twilights as well as springs and dawns, for it is a history which, like that of libertarian beliefs in general, is not to be observed in progressive terms. It is not the history of a movement, an evolution. It is the history of something that, like grass, has been with us from the human beginning, something that may go to earth, like bulbs in winter, and yet be there always, in the dark soil of human society, to break forth in unexpected places and at undisciplined times.

Palaeolithic man, food-gatherer and hunter, was a decentralist by necessity, because the earth did not provide enough wild food to allow crowding, and in modern remotenesses that were too wild or unproductive for civilised men to penetrate, men still lived until very recently in primitive decentralism: Australian aborigines, Papuan inland villagers, Eskimos in far northern Canada. Such men developed, before history touched them, their own complex techniques and cultures to defend a primitive and precarious way of life; they often developed remarkable artistic traditions as well, such as those of the Indians of the Pacific rain forest and some groups of Eskimos. But, since their world was one where concentration meant scarcity and death, they did not develop a political life that allowed the formation of authoritarian structures nor did they make an institution out of war. They practised mutual aid for survival, but this did not make them angels; they practised infanticide and the abandonment of elders for the same reason.

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I think with feeling of those recently living decentralist societies because I have just returned from the Canadian Arctic where the last phase of traditional Eskimo life began as recently as a decade ago. Now, the old nomadic society, in which people moved about in extended families rather than tribes, is at an end, with all its skills abandoned, its traditions, songs and dances fading in the memory. Last year the cariboo-hunting Eskimos probably built their last igloo; now they are herded together into communities ruled by white men, where they live in groups of four to six hundred people, in imitation white men's houses and with guaranteed welfare handouts when they cannot earn money by summer construction work. Their children are being taught by people who know no Eskimo, their young men are losing the skills of the hunt; power élites are beginning to appear in their crowded little northern slums, among a people who never knew what power meant, and the diminishing dog teams (now less than one family in four owns dogs and only about one family in twenty goes on extended hunting or trapping journeys) are symbolic of the loss of freedom among a people who have become physically and mentally dependent on the centralised, bureaucrat-ridden world which the Canadian Government has built since it set out a few years ago to rescue the peoples of the North from "barbarism" and insecurity.

The fate of the Eskimos, and that of so many other primitive cultures during the past quarter of a century, shows that the old, primal decentralism of Stone Age man is doomed even when it has survived into the modern world. From now on, man will be decentralist by intent and experience, because he has known the evils of centralisation and rejected them.

Centralisation began when men settled on the land and cultivated it. Farmers joined together to protect their herds and fields from the other men who still remained nomadic wanderers; to conserve and share out the precious waters; to placate the deities who held the gifts of fertility, the priests who served the deities, and the kings who later usurped the roles of priest and god alike. The little realms of local priest-kings grew into the great valley empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and towering these emerged the first attempt at a world empire, that of the Achaemenian Kings of Persia, who established an administrative colossus which was the prototype of the centralised state, imitated by the despots of Northern India, the Hellenistic god-kings and the divine Caesars of Rome.

We have little knowledge how men clung to their local loyalties and personal lives, how simple people tried to keep control of the affairs and things that concerned them most, in that age when writing recorded the deeds of kings and priests and had little to say about common men. But if we can judge from the highly traditional and at least partly autonomous village societies which still existed in India when the Moghuls arrived, and which had probably survived the centuries of political chaos and strife that lay between Moghuls and Guptas, it seems likely that the farther men in those ages lived

away from the centres of powers, the more they established and defended rights to use the land and govern their own local affairs, so long as the lord's tribute was paid. It was, after all, on the village communities and village councils that had survived through native and Moghul and British empires that Gandhi based his hopes of *panchayat raj*, a society based on autonomous peasant communes.

In Europe the Dark Ages after the Roman Empire were regarded by Victorian historians as a historical waste land ravaged by barbarian hordes and baronial bandits. But these ages were also in fact an interlude during which, in the absence of powerful centralised authorities, the decentralist urge appeared again, and village communes established forms of autonomy which in remoter areas, like the Pyrenees, the Alps and the Apennines, have survived into the present. To the same "Dark" Ages belong the earliest free city republics of mediaeval Europe, which arose at first for mutual protection in the ages of disorder, and which in Italy and Germany remained for centuries the homes of European learning and art and of such freedom as existed in the world of their time. Out of such village communes and such cities arose, in Switzerland, the world's first political federation, based on the shared protection of local freedoms against feudal monarchs and renaissance despots.

Some of these ancient communes exist to this day; the Swiss Canton of Appenzell still acts as a direct democracy in which every citizen takes part in the annual voting on laws; the Italian city state of San Marino still retains its mountaintop independence in a world of great states. But these are rare survivals, due mainly to geographic inaccessibility in the days before modern transport. As national states began to form at the end of the Middle Ages, the attack on decentralism was led not merely by the monarchs and dictators who established highly organised states like Bourbon France and Cromwellian England, but also by the Church and particularly by the larger monastic orders, who in their houses established rules of uniform behaviour and rigid timekeeping that anticipated the next great assault on local and independent freedom, and on the practice of mutual aid; this happened when the villages of Britain and later of other European countries were depopulated in the Agricultural Revolution of the eighteenth century, and their homeless people drifted into the disciplined factories and suffered the alienation produced by the new industrial towns, where all traditional bonds were broken and all the participation in common works that belonged to the mediaeval villages became irrelevant.

It was these developments, the establishment of the centralised state in the seventeenth century and of industrial centralisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that made men for the first time consciously aware of the necessity of decentralism to save them from the soulless world that was developing around them.

Against Cromwell's military state, Gerrard Winstanley and the original Diggers opposed their idea and practice of establishing new communes of landworkers on the waste lands of England, communes

which would renounce overlords and extend participation and equality to men, women, and even children.

When the French Revolution took the way of centralism, establishing a more rigidly bureaucratic state than the Bourbons and introducing universal conscription for the first time, men like Jacques Roux and his fellow *enragés* protested in the name of the local communes of Paris, which they regarded as the bases of democratic administration, and at the same time in England William Godwin, the first of the philosophic anarchists, recognised the perils of forms of government which left decision-making in the hands of men gathered at the top and centre of society. In his *Political Justice* Godwin envisaged countries in which assemblies of delegates would meet—seldom—to discuss matters of urgent common concern, in which no permanent organs of central government would be allowed to continue, and in which each local parish would decide its own affairs by free agreement (and not by majority vote) and matters of dispute would be settled by *ad hoc* juries of arbitration.

The British and French Utopian socialists of the early nineteenth century, as distinct from the Marxists and the revolutionary socialists led by Auguste Blanqui, were inspired by their revulsion against monolithic industrial and political organisation to base the realisation of their theories on small communal units which they believed could be established even before the existing society had been destroyed. At that period the American frontier lay still in the valley of the Mississippi, and there was a tendency—which existed until the end of the pioneering days—for the small pioneer societies of trappers and traders, miners and farmers, to organise themselves in largely autonomous communities that managed their own affairs and in many senses of the word took the law into their own hands. In this society, where men responded to frontier conditions by *ad hoc* participatory and decentralist organisation, the European and American Utopian socialists, as well as various groups of Christian communities, tried to set up self-governing communes which would be the cells of the new fraternal world. The followers of Cabet and Fourier, of Robert Owen and Josiah Warren, all played their part in a movement which produced hundreds of communities and lasted almost a century; its last wave ebbed on the Pacific coast in the Edwardian era, when a large Finnish socialist community was established on the remote island of Sointula off the coast of British Columbia. Only the religious communities of this era, which had a purpose outside mere social theory, survived; even today the Mennonite communities of Canada keep so closely to their ideals of communitarian autonomy that they are leaving the country to find in South America a region where they can be free to educate their children as they wish. The secular communities all vanished; the main lesson their failure taught was that decentralist organisation must reach down to the roots of the present, to the needs of the actual human beings who participate, and not upward into the collapsing dream structures of a Utopian future.

Other great crises in the human situation have followed the industrial revolution, and every one has produced its decentralist movements in which men and women have turned away from the nightmares of magapolitics to the radical realities of human relationships. The crisis of the Indian struggle for independence caused Gandhi to preach the need to build society upon the foundation of the village. The bitter repressions of Tsarist Russia led Peter Kropotkin to develop his theories of a decentralised society integrating industry and agriculture, manual and mental skills. World War II led to considerable community movement among both British and American pacifists, seeking to create cells of sane living in the interstices of a belligerent world, and an even larger movement of decentralism and communitarianism has arisen in North America in contradiction to the society that can wage a war like that in Vietnam. Today it is likely that more people than ever before are consciously engaged in some kind of decentralist venture which expresses not merely rebellion against monolithic authoritarianism, but also faith in the possibility of a new, cellular kind of society in which at every level the participation in decision-making envisaged by nineteenth century anarchists like Proudhon and Kropotkin will be developed.

As the monstrous and fatal flaws of modern economic and political centralism become more evident, as the State is revealed ever more convincingly as the enemy of all human love, the advocacy and practice of decentralism will spread more widely and on an ever-wider scale, if only because the necessity for it will become constantly more urgent. The less decentralist action is tied to rigid social and political theories, and particularly to antediluvian ones like those of the Marxists, the more penetrating, and durable its effects are likely to be. The soils most favourable to the spread of decentralism are probably countries like India, where rural living still predominates, countries like Japan where the decentralisation of factories and the integration of agricultural and industrial economies has already been recognised as a necessity for survival, and the places in our western world where the social rot has run deepest and the decentralists can penetrate like white ants. The moribund centres of the cities; the decaying marginal farmlands; these are the places which centralist governments using bankers' criteria of efficiency cannot possibly revivify, because the profit would be not financial but human. In such areas the small and flexible cell of workers, serving the needs of local people, can survive and continue simultaneously the tasks of quiet destruction and cellular building. But not all the work can be done in the shadows. There will still be the need for theoreticians to carry on the work which Kropotkin and Geddes and Mumford began in the past, of demonstrating the ultimately self-destructive character of political and industrial centralism, and showing how society as a whole, and not merely the lost corners of it, can be brought back to health and peace by breaking down the pyramids of authority, so that men can be given to eat the bread of brotherly love, and not the stones of power—of any power.

The blast of of Alexander Berkman

RICHARD DRINNON

ALMOST TO A MAN EULOGISTS OF SUCCESS and victims of a professional obsession with power, historians have ignored the editor and publisher of the *Blast*. It is a shame. True, he did not ram a canal through an isthmus or wage a war to make the world safe, but for all that he was a remarkable and, in some ways, more admirable figure than those who did.

Alexander Berkman was a rebel from a very early age. Born in Vilna, Russia, in 1870 or 1871, he commenced school in St. Petersburg after his prosperous Jewish father had moved his business to the capital. The virtual civil war within Russian society was as close and as fascinating as the streets outside. One day when he was eleven, for example, his recitation of his geography lesson was interrupted by explosions nearby. The Czar, the excited students soon learned, had been assassinated. The youth went to bed that night enchanted by the words: "Will of the People—tyrant removed—Free Russia. . . ." And his notes for a projected autobiography, which unfortunately remained unwritten, show that he was already older than his years: "Visiting university students initiate me into Nihilism. Secret associations and forbidden books."

Small, dark, and intense, Berkman ever after cultivated a taste for forbidden books, forbidden ideas, forbidden ideals. His *Gymnasium* teachers considered him one of their best students but impossibly defiant.

RICHARD DRINNON is Professor of History at Bucknell University, Pennsylvania. His biography of Emma Goldman, *Rebel in Paradise*, was published in 1961, and he wrote on "Thoreau's Politics of the Upright Man" in *ANARCHY* 26 and "Chessman's Bequest to his Executioners" in *ANARCHY* 39. This essay first appeared as an introduction to the facsimile reprint edition of *Blast* (the journal edited and published by Alexander Berkman in 1916-17), published by Greenwood Reprint Corporation, New York. It appears here with the permission of the publisher and the author.

They finally expelled him for an essay entitled, "There Is No God". Then, threatened with a "wolf's passport" which would have closed every profession to him, he decided to immigrate to America. Taking steerage passage from Hamburg, he landed in New York in February, 1888.

Just four months earlier the men convicted of the Haymarket Bombing had been judicially murdered in Chicago. Berkman almost immediately interested himself in the case: "My vision of America as the land of freedom and promise," he later wrote a friend, "soon became dead ashes." He became an anarchist and follower of the ideas of Peter Kropotkin. Labour strife in Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892, moved Berkman to fury. When the force of Pinkerton guards killed ten workers, Berkman resolved to retaliate by assassinating Henry Clay Frick, Chairman of Carnegie Steel and employer of the Pinkertons. Though Berkman made a very serious effort to carry through his plan, his intended victim escaped with minor wounds.

Whatever his intentions, Berkman's act was ill-conceived. After his recovery Frick became even more adamantly anti-union. Ironically, the workers misinterpreted Berkman's motives, some assuming he and Frick had had a business misunderstanding and others suspecting him of acting as Frick's secret agent to gain sympathy for the steel baron. On the other hand, the act did prove the authenticity of his belief in his ideals. Moreover, he showed that he was willing to meet the dilemma of violence and counter-violence by sacrificing his own life for the life he attempted to take—as William Marion Reedy once remarked with insight, "Berkman sought not so much to sacrifice Frick as to sacrifice Berkman." Still, the act was in many ways disastrous and its real folly flowed from Berkman's assumption that the just life could be promoted by killing.

Berkman spent the next fourteen years in prison. Four years after his release, he published the *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (1912), a searching, well-written inquiry into the psychology of men behind bars. Crowded years followed as editor of Emma Goldman's monthly, *Mother Earth*—in which position he showed himself to be mercifully free of most of the revolutionary clichés which hounded other radicals—as one of the founders and first instructors in the Francisco Ferrer Modern School, as organizer of the unemployed in 1912, and as agitator-at-large for such causes as the Lawrence strike and against such outrages as the Ludlow massacre.

Late in 1915, Berkman went out to California to see if he could help with the cases of Matthew Schmidt and David Caplan, friends who had recently been jailed for their alleged part, along with the McNamara brothers, in the dynamiting, a half-decade earlier, of the Los Angeles Times Building. "Neither of the men was in favour of my idea that ONLY a country-wide campaign of agitation would save them," he wrote a friend. "They wanted to pussyfoot things, and I even had a very hot argument about it with Matt's sister. . . . [Anton] Johannsen and the whole 'radical' labour bunch was [sic] against me." Though Berkman had planned to establish a radical labour weekly in the South,

he yielded to Schmidt's pleas that he carry on his work elsewhere.

Berkman was thus publishing and editing the *Blast* in San Francisco when a terrible event occurred during a preparedness parade. On 22nd July, 1916, a bomb explosion killed eight paraders and bystanders on the spot and wounded forty more. Berkman soon had occasion to mount his country-wide campaign of agitation.

Detective Martin Swanson, retained by local capitalists, interested in public utilities, helped pin the crime on Thomas J. Mooney, regarded by his employers as a "troublesome factor" in labour disputes, and on Warren Billings, a young and rather distant associate of Mooney. District Attorney Charles Fickert, who had refused to prosecute graft charges against the president of United Railways, jumped at the chance of prosecuting Mooney, the enemy of United Railways. Mooney and Billings were arrested, without warrants, on 26th July, two days after a "Law and Order Committee" raised \$400,000 to rid the community of "anarchist elements". Like a boom town, the frame-up was thrown together with surprising rapidity.

To make matters worse, liberals, trade unionists, and radicals in the Bay Area assumed from the beginning that Mooney and Billings were guilty. Even the libertarian Fremont Older, editor of the San Francisco *Bulletin*, stood back and expressed the feeling of the general public toward Mooney: "Let the son of a bitch hang".

Berkman and M. Eleanor Fitzgerald, his lovely, red-maned "associate worker", along with a few of their friends, were virtually alone in their conviction that Mooney and Billings were innocent. As a start, Berkman fought in the columns of the *Blast* against the unthinking and spineless acceptance of the Swanson and Fickert charges. He prevailed upon his friend Robert Minor, the gifted cartoonist and journalist, to take up the cause of the arrested men. He organized the first of the Mooney-Billings defence committees, with Emma Goldman, his great comrade, Fitzgerald, and Minor as fellow members. After some weeks of frustrating effort, the committee finally struck a spark of interest in Western radical and labour circles. Fremont Older was one of the first to admit he had been wrong—in 1931 he wrote Emma Goldman that he had been "doing amends" for his initial response for fifteen years—and to throw his weight behind the campaign for the accused men.

Meanwhile, Emma Goldman had failed to persuade Frank P. Walsh, the nationally famous attorney, to take the case for the defence. Intent upon securing a competent lawyer, Berkman travelled across the country, interesting unions in the case on his way. In New York he sought out the highly-paid and well-known figure, W. Bourke Cockran. The latter was so impressed by Berkman's eloquent description of the conspiracy against Mooney that he offered to take the case without pay. While in the East, Berkman also managed to rouse the interest and support of radicals and Jewish labour unions.

Berkman had almost single-handedly set in motion the nation-wide campaign he had talked about earlier. Years later, when Mooney's defence had been taken over by the Communists, Berkman's extra-

ordinary achievement was deliberately ignored in historical presentations of the case. But this much was beyond dispute: Thanks primarily to Berkman, Mooney had a competent attorney, some funds, and considerable left-wing support. And this was of crucial importance "in those early days", as Mooney later gratefully wrote Berkman, "when the going was tough".

All this, alas, was not enough. Mooney was sentenced to hang and Billings was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Berkman had known all along that he ran great personal risk in his work for the two men. Swanson and Fickert had threatened to hang him along with Mooney. Now, with the latter out of the way, action could be taken against "the real power behind the defence", as Fickert described Berkman. With absolutely no real evidence to go on, the District Attorney secured a grand jury indictment of Berkman for murder. But by this time, fortunately, the latter was in New York's Tombs, awaiting an appeal of his and Emma Goldman's conviction for conspiring against military registration. The national government's interest, labour and radical protests against his proposed extradition, and the fundamental weakness of the case against him—all contributed to deny Fickert the pleasure of hanging him. Although the dangers Berkman braved to support Mooney were given an unmistakable demonstration, he continued the fight from his jail cell.

Russian workers in Petrograd and sailors in Kronstadt took up the campaign and gave it international dimensions. Ambassador Francis was mystified by the crowds outside the American Embassy in Petrograd chanting "Muni! Muni!" until he was informed that they were protesting the conviction of Mooney in California, half a world away. Such demonstrations, which occurred a number of times in 1917 and early 1918, were answers to messages sent to Russia by Berkman and his co-workers. Thus when Fickert tried to extradite Berkman, Emma Goldman and the Committee sent off a cable to Russian sympathizers: "Uncle is sick of the same disease as Tom. Tell friends." The cable slipped by the censors and the demonstrators chanted Berkman's name as well as Mooney's.

President Wilson learned of the protests, of course, through Ambassador Francis. To make sure he felt their full weight, Berkman arranged to have a radical friend go to Washington. Soon Wilson's favourite papers were peppered with news items on the Russian agitation; government officials were personally informed of happenings on the Coast. This publicity campaign was just well-started when Wilson announced the appointment of a mediation committee that was to conduct a thorough investigation.

After the investigation Wilson asked Governor Stephens of California to commute Mooney's sentence. Stephens took no action. The Kronstadt sailors again demonstrated and Ambassador Francis reportedly promised to work for the release of the imprisoned men. Then Wilson again wired Stephens that he hoped Mooney's sentence would be commuted, for it would have a "heartfelt effect upon certain international affairs". After further intercessions from the White House, and after a

second federal investigation turned up further grave irregularities in Fickert's conduct of the case, Governor Stephens complied with Wilson's repeated requests. Reluctantly, protestingly, Stephens signed the commutation of Mooney's sentence, angrily charging that "the propaganda in his behalf following the plan outlined by Berkman has been so effective as to become world-wide".

Official cowardice and cruelty were to keep Mooney behind bars for more than two decades, but Berkman's campaign had helped to save his life.

The pages of the *Blast* seem to smell of black powder or, better, seem to have blown out of the eye of a social hurricane. A sense of absolute emergency pervades almost every column. Unlike some other radical periodicals, this was not mere pose, propped up by a pseudo-desperate barricade rhetoric. Real people were being locked up and sentenced to death. Each issue of the *Blast* threatened to be the last. After it had most improbably reached its first birthday, the editor looked back at all the crises, hurries, and harassments with some surprises himself! They had overcome "chicken-hearted printers, fearful of what their respectable customers would say; sly underhand wire-pulling by grafters, high and low; bitter opposition by Mother Grundies in silk skirts and overalls; stupid censorship and arbitrary deprivation of second-class rights; police-terrorized newsdealers, open persecution and hidden malice. . . ." Part of their compensation was in knowing the *Blast* had been "a sharp thorn in the law and order reactionists".

Here and there, apart from all this high seriousness, you will run across traces of conscious and unconscious humour. No doubt an example of the latter was an item on a 4th of July picnic, sponsored by the *Blast*, at which "we gave away the premium of Nietzsche's Complete Works, which was 'gathered in' by No. 1775A, held by E. Barabino, a young Italian comrade of Oakland. . . ."

Students of recent history will find this reprinting useful. Published for less than a year and a half, the *Blast* still gives the careful reader insights into the causes and fights of the political far left. It remains the best contemporary source on the early phases of the Mooney case. For those interested in Wilsonian liberalism in the pre-war months, it contains interesting material on the suppression of *Regeneracion*, a Spanish-language weekly published in Los Angeles, and the imprisonment of its editors, Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magon. Their case, along with others, raised the question of the authenticity of Wilson's liberalism long before all the acts of suppression could be blamed on Attorney General Palmer. Moreover, the Magon case was of significance in its own right, for the brothers were, from all unofficial accounts, men of rare idealism and courage who undertook this early to organize the Mexican Americans—a task that remains unfinished today, as the recent strikes of Cesar Chavez and his Farm Workers Union show. Social historians will be interested in the accounts of the arrests of Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger, when the latter was still a radical, for their birth control agitation. Students of the graphic arts will be interested in the trenchant social commentary of Robert

Minor's cartoons.

Since the *Blast* was first and last a venture in personal journalism, an afterword on its editor is in order. Berkman spent the war years in the federal prison at Atlanta and, in late 1919, along with some 200 other rejects from the American dream, was deported to Russia. He was welcomed with open arms by the revolutionists and was soon enthusiastically at work helping build a new society. From the first, however, he was critical of the economic inequities perpetuated by Lenin and his followers and increasingly disturbed by the systematic terror. After the slaughter of the Kronstadt sailors in March, 1921, Berkman and Emma Goldman left Russia in dismay, convinced that the Communists were intent on "rearing generations of slaves" to the state apparatus.

In Berlin, where he lived for the next few years, Berkman served as secretary-treasurer of the Russian Political Prisoners' Relief Committee, collected most of the materials and affidavits for *Letters from Russian Prisons* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), nominally edited by Roger Baldwin and still a valuable source on early Communist oppression, and wrote his own *Bolshevik Myth* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925), a discriminating attack on the emergent totalitarianism from a libertarian perspective.

Holding only a Nansen passport as a stateless person, Berkman moved to Paris in 1925, and finally settled in Nice where, save for several interruptions, he lived out the rest of his life. On three occasions in the early 1930's he was expelled from France and, while friends came to his rescue, he remained at the mercy of the authorities and the local gendarmes. Berkman eked out a poor and precarious existence with his writing and translating, and by giving his lifelong friend, Emma Goldman, assistance in writing her *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1931). But his last years hardly supported the contention of Communists that he was living grandly on the Riviera after having "betrayed" the Revolution. Unwilling to exist in complete dependence on the generosity of friends and suffering from a serious illness, Berkman shot himself to death in June, 1936.

Berkman died on the eve of the Spanish Civil War and revolution, which in a sense really marked the beginning of our times, but a statement suitable for an epitaph was written in the 1920's by Eugene O'Neill. "As for my fame (God help us!), and your infame," O'Neill wrote Berkman, "I would be willing to exchange a good deal of mine for a bit of yours. It is not so hard to write what one feels as truth. It is damned hard to live it."

An anarchist utopia

LYMAN TOWER SARGENT

SINCE THERE ARE SO FEW ANARCHIST UTOPIAS it is important not to forget those few that have been written. Very few anarchists have attempted to present in literary form a picture of their ideal. Perhaps this has been true because the nature of anarchism dictates a high degree of flexibility and a lack of predictability, but therefore it is doubly important to look at those anarchist utopias that have been written. The utopian novel has historically been a vehicle for the expression of political philosophy, most commonly some form of socialism. It provides an important and unique tool for communicating a political philosophy. It is capable of making points to a wide variety of people in a way that the essay or tract cannot. If well written, although very few are, it provides a unique propaganda device and allows the author to draw together his thoughts on all the aspects of society rather than a few or limited aspects.

A study of an old novel, such as Robert Blatchford's *The Sorcery Shop*, allows us to do two things. First, it gives us a possibility of analysing one man's idea of a perfect anarchist society with all of the idiosyncrasies of that individual. Second, it provides the possibility of commenting on contemporary theory by noting some ways in which a contemporary anarchist might change the picture presented. The first is a worthwhile exercise, particularly in the case of the rare anarchist utopia. But the second is peculiarly interesting, because the utopian format, which provides a picture of an entire society, allows one to comment on all or at least most of the aspects of anarchism within a relatively brief space. The utopian novel is peculiar in this sense because it provides us with a picture of an entire society from the point of view of the author. Thus the commentator is capable of looking at more aspects than is typically possible.

LYMAN TOWER SARGENT, of the University of Missouri at Saint Louis, believes that "one of the most interesting things that an anarchist today with some literary talent could undertake would be the development of a utopian novel that presents an anarchist society".

Blatchford's novel is not exceptionally well written but is not particularly badly written either. Thus, from a literary point of view, it is at least just barely worth the effort. He gets us to his utopia with a device that is not typical of the utopian novels of time but which is not peculiarly atypical. He uses magic. The utopia is found in England, probably contemporaneous with the time of writing. It is difficult to say much about the temporal location of the utopia because he says that he has attempted "to show the possibility of organizing and carrying on a prosperous and healthy commune without calling in any other mechanical aids than those with which we are already the masters".

Even though he subtitles his novel *An impossible Romance*, he is trying to demonstrate that an anarchist society is in fact possible by pointing out how things could be changed in contemporary England to produce a totally different society. As he says "our country is by nature opulent. We have a favourable climate, and an almost unlimited endowment of natural wealth. Our people are, or would be under proper conditions, hardy, industrious, placable, and inventive. Labour of one man, properly directed, and with the mechanical aids we now possess, would suffice to supply the needs of many." Although many might argue about the climate and the natural wealth of England, the point is that he is attempting to demonstrate that an anarchist utopia is possible with the characteristics found in England at the time of writing.

The most important element of this utopia, at least from the point of view of the anarchist, is that there is no government. A careful reading does not produce any idea of any replacement for government. It is impossible to find any implication of any form of government except by stretching one comment about a town hall. Therefore, it is clear that there is no political authority found in any institutionalized framework within the utopia. He calls his political philosophy socialism, but he presents a clearly anarchist framework.

For Blatchford, the second most important element of his utopia, and the one that he seems to believe makes it truly possible, is the lack of money. The economy is not based on money in any sense. There is no medium of exchange established in the society at all. As might be expected from such a utopia people share among themselves on the basis of need. Work is performed on the basis of ability and interest. No one is compelled to do any work whatsoever although work is honoured and is undertaken by all members of the society because each individual feels, first, that he is contributing to society as a whole, second, that he is contributing through society to himself, and third, for a very simple and important reason—because doing something is essential to man and is enjoyable.

The utopia is presented by a magician taking two stereotyped members of English upper-class society, one a retired general and the other a wealthy capitalist, to show them how England could be reorganized. The wealthy capitalist, a totally unfeeling individual, is never convinced. The general, although not completely convinced, has an eye for beauty and a love of people that at least allows him to look with some favour on the society. The major question that they raise which

Blatchford tries to answer is how the economy can produce abundance without capitalism. The magician answers them by arguing that this is possible primarily, or perhaps solely, due to the elimination of waste. He presents a long list of the wasteful elements of contemporary English society which have been done away with in anarchist England. This list is as follows:

1. Rent. 2. Profit. 3. Alcohol and Tobacco. 4. The Military. 5. The Legal Establishment. 6. The Exchange Mechanism (Banks, etc.). 7. Insurance. 8. Salesman, etc. 9. The Monarchy. 10. The Religious Establishment. 11. Competition. 12. Advertisement. 13. Meat. 14. The Idle Poor and the Idle Rich. 15. Most Illness.

Blatchford contends that with all of these evils eliminated abundance is not only possible but fairly easy to achieve. It will be noted from the list that the society is vegetarian and has no alcohol or tobacco. The contention is, as we know accurately, that alcohol and tobacco are not good for the human being, and therefore they would not be found in the revolutionized society. Blatchford presents the same argument for the elimination of meat. He believes that vegetarianism is more healthy and considerably less wasteful. These are very minor points and are not important enough to dwell on, but according to Blatchford they help to eliminate much of the sickness found in contemporary society. Other illness is eliminated through the healthy life that is led. If one is ill, medical care is freely provided.

The key to an understanding of the social system is the family. Blatchford argues that a monogamous family relationship, enforced by custom rather than law, is the key to a lasting society. There are no sexual relations outside of marriage. Of course individuals may separate when they wish to, but they seldom do. The emphasis is placed so strongly on the woman, particularly the mother, that a man who separates from his wife finds it very difficult to remarry because, according to Blatchford, no woman will be interested in marrying a man who has failed in one marriage.

The greatest emphasis in the whole marriage relationship is on the mother. The mother is the educational system. All children are educated at home by the mother in the three R's and whatever else she has skill in. In addition the child is educated by other mothers who have particular skills. Blatchford also argues that there is an educational role in work, and that as the child becomes old enough to work, he will gain the education necessary for him to pursue whatever combination of vocations and avocations is of interest to him.

The contemporary anarchist would look at the family system with some question. He would be likely to view the extremely monogamous system with some dismay. He might argue that this type of exclusiveness could be detrimental to the society. Contemporary anarchists would be more likely to emphasize the free choice of each individual involved to arrange the type of marriage system that he or she finds most desirable, whether this system be monogamous, a communal relationship of some sort, or whatever. The contemporary anarchist views the role of sexual relationships in society as much more important than

Blatchford would have for the simple reason that we have discovered much more about its importance since Blatchford wrote.

Blatchford's presentation of the marriage system raises one other particularly important point for the anarchist: custom. It has been argued by George Woodcock that the role of public opinion could be pernicious in an anarchist society by replacing law. Whether or not one accepts Woodcock's point, one must recognize the same danger in custom. Since custom is one of the sources of law and in some circumstances plays the same role as law, certain customs, such as a form of marriage relationship, could become established in any society and take the place of law. Then Woodcock's point would be even more important because public opinion can act as an enforcing mechanism for custom. Thus, it would be fairly easy to re-develop a legal system in an anarchist society without any of the apparent structures of government.

The final key to Blatchford's utopia is the setting of the society. The impression that the utopia he gives is one of an agrarian society similar to that found in Morris' *News From Nowhere*. At the same time one gets the feeling that, again like Morris, the society is not truly a rural society. Cities do not exist but there are relatively large towns in place of them. At the same time the emphasis is on the ability of each individual to be able to associate with others as he wishes or to choose solitude as he wishes. Also the society is designed so that each individual is readily capable of getting out of town into a rural area as his wishes dictate. Thus the emphasis in the society seems to be on the agrarian side rather than the urban.

There are a few other points that need to be mentioned. There is a highly developed science in the utopia—astronomy is particularly stressed. In line with the point at the beginning, that he was attempting to present a picture of a possible society without major mechanical changes, technology is almost unmentioned.

The recreational aspects of life are discussed at some length. Blatchford seems to be particularly fond of dancing and team sports. He rejects, as one might expect, blood sports. He recognizes clearly the need for play in society, and he provides for many outlets. One of the most significant outlets, although this is also a major element of most individuals work life, is found in art. Again Blatchford is very similar to Morris in this in that the art forms most often mentioned are craft oriented rather than the so-called fine arts. It should not be thought that Blatchford neglects the fine arts, but he seems to be more interested in the crafts.

In comparison to the modern anarchist theorist, Blatchford had a relatively easy time of it because he did not have to deal with the problems of industrialization, our current rampant urbanization, or the question of automation. The first two points, industrialization and urbanization, present peculiar problems for anyone attempting to achieve a society of freedom. The last point, automation, may present serious problems, but at the same time it is likely to produce a revolutionized society, a society based on leisure rather than work, that will present the anarchist and other revolutionaries with great possibilities for pro-

ducing change in the desired direction. Blatchford believed that the change to the anarchist society must come about through evolution rather than revolution. We recognize that great changes can come about through evolution, but we also must realize that major changes in society come about more easily when there is change in the society that causes some significant degree of dislocation and which forces some significant rethinking of social norms, structures, and institutions. Automation is doing this and will continue to do it in the future. A society based on leisure can be either a highly regimented society or one based on freedom. Thus the situation existing today is one in which great amounts of change are likely to come about. The direction of these changes has not as yet been thoroughly determined.

Blatchford believed that a violent revolution was possible and desirable if it was impossible to achieve the results by evolution. Depending on the society that one wishes to produce the question is still relevant. Is it better to hope to be able to direct, or at least influence, the direction of evolution or is it better to hope to be able to control the results of revolution. We have seen in the French Revolution of 1968 that a revolution can come about almost spontaneously and that the leaders of the revolution may have no control over its results. It is likely, I believe, that a revolution today would not produce an anarchist result. A revolution today, if unsuccessful, is likely to produce more suppression, and if it is successful, it is still likely to produce an authoritarian regime.

One of the most interesting things that an anarchist today with some literary talent could undertake would be the development of a utopian novel that presents an anarchist society. In the past such novels have gained widespread popularity and they are, or can be, major instruments of propaganda. The anarchist must still deal with the inability of people to see the possibility of a society without government, and the presentation of such a society in a well-written novel could be an effective way of presenting answers to the beliefs of the opponents of anarchism. If such a novel is not forthcoming, it is then important to look at the anarchist utopias of the past even though in some ways they are outmoded and seem a bit naive.

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